



Eric Newman <[REDACTED]>

## Machin's Mills Mint Site Article Research

7 messages

Mark Fox <[REDACTED]>  
To: [REDACTED]

Sun, Aug 5, 2012 at 6:53 AM

Sunday, August 5, 2012

Dear Mr. Newman,

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Best regards,

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Michigan

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To: [REDACTED]

Sun, Aug 5, 2012 at 1:09 PM

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As you may know my foundation has a nice collection of Machin pieces but most of these were obtained from the Fairfield (Connecticut) Hoard through Stacks. If there is any specific matter which I may know about please ask me. Thank you for contacting me. Good Luck.

Eric P. Newman  
Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society

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## 2 attachments

 **Bicentennial.pdf**  
1532K

 **1207\_fox.pdf**  
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Mon, Sep 3, 2012 at 4:35 PM

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Please keep me up to date at convenience. Tell me whether any of our comments are helpful or need further clarification. My best Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society, Eric P. Newman, pres..

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Also, there appears to have been another lot of Machin's Mills artifacts, sold in 2005 by Absolute Auctions:

I haven't confirmed it yet, but I strongly suspect Michael Demling was the winner of that lot. I am currently trying to get in touch with him via e-mail, but I am uncertain if I will be successful before my deadline.

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Sat, Sep 15, 2012 at 6:48 AM

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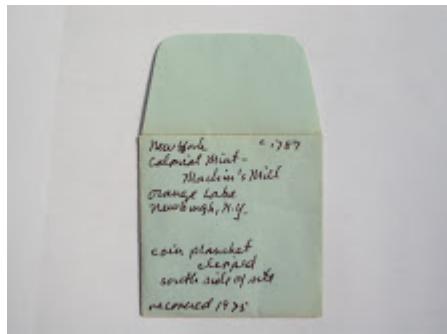
[Quoted text hidden]

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**4 attachments**

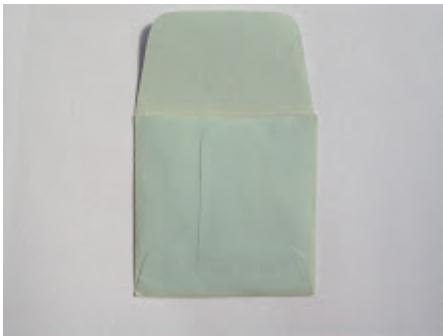


ClippedPlanchet\_RadCurdyFind\_1975.jpg  
291K



100\_4008.JPG  
961K

100\_4010.JPG  
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100\_4006.JPG  
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Eric Newman <[REDACTED]>

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1 message

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To: [REDACTED]

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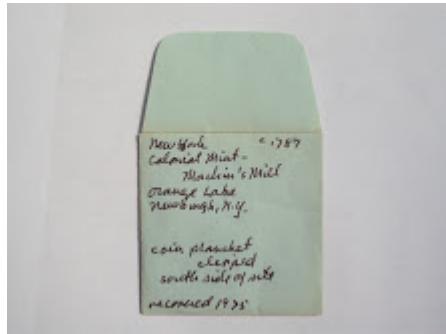
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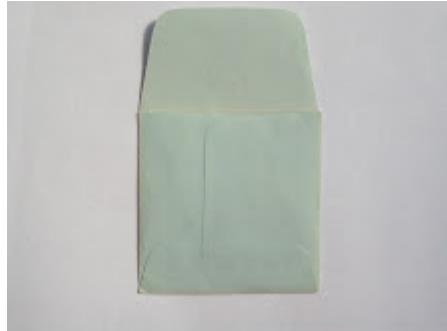


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Please send me a separate copy of the photo as well as a copy of the article when available.

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I have attached photos of the planchet and envelope in case you were interested. Enjoy!

Best regards,

Mark Fox  
Michigan

On Mon, Sep 3, 2012 at 8:39 PM, Mark Fox <[REDACTED]> wrote:  
Monday, September 3, 2012

Dear Mr. Newman,

And it was very good to hear from you too! With a submission deadline of September 8, every bit of help to ease the last phases of my research is greatly appreciated.

I am happy to say that I have indeed seen your 1959 Empire Topics notice, which Gary Trudgen had kindly alerted me to recently. It was republished in the August 2009 issue of CNL. Earlier, he also sent me a PDF scan of your ANS Centennial publication article which Robert Martin raved about. Yes, I also thought it was a

very good piece of detective work and very well written!

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As for Louis Jordan, I regularly consult his indispensable colonial website. His bibliographical list for each series of coins is alone worth the visit!

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To keep you updated, I would like to end this message with the following news:

Robert Martin has identified John Kraljevich as the high bidder of lot #1099 of the Radford Curdy estate sale conducted by Absolute Auctions on January 13, 2007. To my amazement, Mr. Kraljevich has promised to send me some of the copper fragments Mr. Curdy had found at Machin's Mills, and one of the two Mexican counterfeit 2 reales, to photograph and study! However, he says the 2-reales coin that he is sending may have been only found near Machin's Mills and not at the actual mint site. It is very worn and the envelope with the provenance info has been misplaced. According to Mr. Kraljevich, it is the same type as this piece sold by Stack's in late 2009:

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Best regards,

Mark Fox  
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On Mon, Sep 3, 2012 at 5:35 PM, <[REDACTED]> wrote:

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Please keep me up to date at convenience. Tell me whether any of our comments are helpful or need further clarification. My best Eric P. Newman Numismatic

Education Society, Eric P, Newman, pres..

In a message dated 9/2/2012 2:32:40 P.M. Central Daylight Time, [REDACTED] writes:

Sunday, September 2, 2012

Dear Mr. Newman,

I pray that this message finds you well. A lot of research has been done since we last discussed my Machin's Mills article project, but one fact remains a bit elusive: Do you by chance know who was the first to identify certain counterfeit British halfpence or other colonial coins to be products of Machin's Mills?

I still look forward to reading your notes about your visit to the mint site, when it is possible and convenient for you.

Hope you are having a great Labor Day weekend!

Best regards,

Mark Fox  
Michigan

On Sun, Aug 5, 2012 at 6:11 PM, Mark Fox <[REDACTED]> wrote:  
Sunday, August 5, 2012

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One other thing I had wanted to ask was if you still had the photo of the old Machin homestead that is pictured in the attached Rare Coin Review article by Gary Trudgen. I would be interested in using it in my work with your permission, but I understand that this sort of item might be hard to relocate, so please do not feel obligated to look.

I regret not having written to you years ago about some of the research I have been doing, although admittedly, I have only recently been studying early American coinage actively. For what little it is worth, I append here my latest article, published in the July 2012 issue of *The Numismatist*, in case you do not receive this publication and the subject matter interests you.

Thank you again for taking the time to write me! I pray that your vacation will be a pleasant and relaxing one.

Best regards,

Mark Fox  
Michigan

On Sun, Aug 5, 2012 at 2:09 PM, <[REDACTED]> wrote:  
Dear Mark Fox:

I am delighted with your research on the MACHIN'S MILLS subject. My visit to the site was being driven there in Wayne Raymond's big Cadillac from New York City to Newburg where I saw portions of the chain and log Hudson River blockade erected to prevent British ships from going upriver by the Americans getting an opportunity to fire at a stationary vessel with cannon balls from the shore. We then went up to Orange Lake to see its several outlets and their adjustable board dams and think we located the site of the mill on a confined rivulet which powered the machinery.

I am on vacation now and will try to find my notes of over 60 years when I return home in September if that is still desirable. Have I ever written up this matter? I believe I have mentioned it. It is so long ago it is hard to remember. It is so sad that the records which were burned up at the New York State Library are gone.

As you may know my foundation has a nice collection of Machin pieces but most of these were obtained from the Fairfield (Connecticut) Hoard through Stacks. If there is any specific matter which I may know about please ask me.

Thank you for contacting me. Good Luck. Eric P. Newman  
Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society

In a message dated 8/5/2012 7:53:36 A.M. Eastern Daylight Time, [REDACTED] writes:

Sunday, August 5, 2012

Dear Mr. Newman,

It is a great honor to be writing to you! Gary Trudgen had kindly suggested that I contact you in regards to my article research on the Machin's Mills mint for *The Numismatist*. My focus is on the mint site and objects of historical interest that have been recovered there, particularly coins, which may help provide insight into the many mysteries surrounding the coinage and minting operations of this colonial enterprise. Gary said that you had either surveyed the site yourself, probably in the 1960s, or hired someone for the job. I would be very interested in knowing what your findings were, if you are willing. The only US colonial coin recovered from the Machin's Mills mint site that I am aware of is a 1787 4-L Connecticut copper, found in 1965 by the late Radford Curdy. On the envelope the coin was stored in, Curdy wrote that the coin was "found in burnt ash in smelter area, Machin Mills, April, 1965." This information was found in an article by Robert Martin on Curdy and his Machin's Mills mint site finds.

As you probably know only too well, there have been many surveys of the mint site over the years. Even so, I am currently trying to arrange to conduct a new one of the site with the help of several numismatists/metal detectorists. The owner has already provided permission and will graciously make his cottage available for such visits. However, because of the distance involved and many obligations, I will not be able to participate directly in the searching. Just yesterday, Julia Purdy conducted a preliminary search of the grounds with the owner. Neither found anything much of interest, although her report strongly indicates that the property has not been searched out.

Thank you very much for your valuable time and for any help that you can provide! My submission deadline for the article is September 8, although I may be able to extend it slightly if I choose to submit my work in two parts, for the November and December issues of *The Numismatist*.

Best regards,

Mark Fox  
Michigan

Mark Fox <[REDACTED]>

To: [REDACTED]

Wed, Sep 26, 2012 at 12:50 PM

Wednesday, September 26, 2012

Dear Mr. Newman,

My apologies for taking so long to get back to you. Aside from trying to wrap up my research on Machin's Mills as fast as I can, I have also been recovering from the flu or a strange cold that I came down with last Saturday.

Many thanks for allowing me to use your Machin homestead photo in my article! Please find enclosed a copy of it as requested. I hope the quality is sufficient. I will most certainly send you a print copy of my work, when it reaches that stage.

Recently, I have been engrossed in your article, "A Recently Discovered Coin Solves a Vermont Numismatic Enigma," published in the *Centennial Publication of The American Numismatic Society*. By chance, do you still have a photo available of your Vlack 9-76B? I would be honored to illustrate it in my work.

Best regards,

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[Quoted text hidden]

THE COLONIAL NEWSLETTER FOUNDATION, INC.  
P.O. Box 4411  
Huntsville, Alabama 35802



Homestead.jpg  
969K

Photo: Eric P. Newman Education Society  
Residence of Thomas Machin built 1783 Orange Lake NY  
Right part is later addition.

Mark Fox <[REDACTED]>

To: [REDACTED]

Sun, Oct 7, 2012 at 12:32 PM

Sunday, October 7, 2012

Dear Mr. Newman,

I am not certain if you have had a chance yet to look at my article manuscript. In case you haven't seen it, I thought it would be good at this point to show you my latest draft, if you are not too busy. It contains several revisions. Any comments or suggestions concerning my work would be greatly appreciated, but of course do not feel obligated.

To my surprise, I was informed last week that the article has been rescheduled for the December issue of *The Numismatist*. On the good side, this has given me a little more time to tie up loose ends. The article will likely be submitted this Tuesday or a few days after.

Best regards,

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[Quoted text hidden]

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**MchMill3.doc**

97K



Eric Newman &lt;[REDACTED]&gt;

**Re: Machin's Mills Mint Site Article Research**

3 messages

[REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>  
To: [REDACTED]

Sat, Sep 15, 2012 at 3:09 PM

Dear Mr. Fox:

I am delighted that my photo of the Machin's Mills homestead has at last been located. Naturally you have our permission to use it. Please credit its use in your article to ERIC P. NEWMAN NUMISMATIC EDUCATION SOCIETY which as you may know is a not for profit Missouri corporation which has been operating since 1953 as an operating foundation under federal tax law.

Please send me a separate copy of the photo as well as a copy of the article when available.

My best                    Eric P. Newman, pres. .

In a message dated 9/15/2012 6:48:34 A.M. Central Daylight Time, [REDACTED] writes:

Saturday, September 15, 2012

Dear Mr. Newman,

I just confirmed yesterday that Gary Trudgen still has your photo of the Machin homestead, taken during your visit to Machin's Mills. Would it be permissible to use it in my article? If so, should I credit you for the image?

In other news, the Machin's Mills find material arrived one week ago today from John Kraljevich and is quite amazing. One of the most surprising artifacts from the group is an unstruck and clipped halfpenny-sized planchet (5.73 grams, 22.06 x 27.20mm) which Radford Curdy had found, according to the envelope, in 1975 on the south side of the site." This agrees with Gary Trudgen's belief that the mill was opened from that side. Many tiny pieces of copper scrap were probably swept out the door from time to time. I am of the opinion that the two clips, directly opposite each other, are likely due to other planchets that were cut out of the sheet a little too close to the planchet in question.

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Eric P. Newman

Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education

Society

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Mark Fox  
Michigan

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**Mark Fox <**

To: [REDACTED]

Wed, Sep 26, 2012 at 1:50 PM

Wednesday, September 26, 2012

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Michigan

[Quoted text hidden]

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THE COLONIAL NEWSLETTER FOUNDATION, INC.  
P.O. Box 4411  
Huntsville, Alabama 35802



**Homestead.jpg**  
969K

Photo: Eric P. Newman Education Society  
Residence of Thomas Machin built 1783 Orange Lake NY  
Right part is later addition.

---

**Mark Fox <**

To: [REDACTED]

Sun, Oct 7, 2012 at 1:32 PM

Sunday, October 7, 2012

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Best regards,

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1/17/2019

Gmail - Re: Machin's Mills Mint Site Article Research

[Quoted text hidden]

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 **MchMill3.doc**  
97K



Eric Newman &lt;[REDACTED]&gt;

## Preview of Machin's Mills Coin Article

1 message

Mark Fox <[REDACTED]>  
To: [REDACTED]

Sun, Sep 30, 2012 at 1:18 PM

Sunday, September 30, 2012

Dear Mr. Newman,

Please forgive me. I almost forgot to send you a preview of my article, "In Search of Machin's Mills" today. It must be submitted to *The Numismatist* by the middle of this week.

Do not feel obligated, but if you have any comments or suggestions to offer, I would more than welcome them. My goal is to trim the article to around 5,000 words as the manuscript is much too large as is. I welcome any suggestions along these lines as well.

Jack Howes has kindly sent me photos of some examples of Vlack 9-76B, one of which I think will look good in my work. The only other coin images I need now are of an original 1787 George Clinton copper, which is turning into more of a task than I had anticipated. I guess I didn't realize how rare these pattern coins are!

Thank you again for all your past help!

Best regards,

Mark Fox  
Michigan

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MchMill3.doc  
98K

**Mark Fox**  
**5426 S. Gordon Ave.**  
**Newaygo, MI 49337**  
**Phone: (231) 652-2368**

**E-mail:** [REDACTED]  
**ANA Member: R- 3134438**

*Wednesday, September 26–30, 2012*

*About 6,789 words*

## In Search of Machin's Mills

by Mark Fox

On the day before the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in 2000, I had dropped in with my father and one or more brothers and sisters to see a late close friend of the family. In addition to being an informal handyman, he regularly ran a “garage sale” every Saturday from late spring to early fall, or whenever he sensed promising buying weather. Teasingly dubbed by me as “Leo’s Trade O’Rama,” and being only about a mile away from my family’s home in Michigan, we used to stop frequently at his cluttered garage, in between harvesting fruits and vegetables for our roadside farm market.

However, on this day I had more on my mind than a casual browse of Leo’s assorted knickknacks, constantly picked up from other sales and who knows where. For a long time I had persistently inquired about his small family collection of numismatic curios, some handed down to him by his father. He occasionally raided it to find pieces to sell in a hinged glass display case in his garage under a fluorescent glow, the spot you were sure to find me. On this particular occasion Leo brought out a little jar filled with several coins. Without warning, he rigorously jingled the jar in front of me. Even then I was condition conscious of my coins, so he probably found some amusement in seeing me cringe. Somehow though, without having ever held one before, I instinctively knew two of the coins in the group were US copper colonials. A couple of the very coins I had thought I would never own without breaking the bank were mine for \$1 a piece! I quickly snatched them up, plus a 1936 Australian 50 pence, and possibly some other less memorable world coins. A fortuitous entry into the world of US colonials had begun.

### Curious George III

Aided by my copy of the Breen Book, one of the ancient-looking coppers was revealed to be an illicit creation of the Machin’s Mills mint (1787– circa 1790), struck in a converted mill built by Thomas Machin near Newburgh, New York. The coin posed as a 1787 British halfpenny of King George III, despite the fact that Britain did not issue any halfpence for circulation with this date! The obverse read “GEORGIVS III . REX .” around a laureate and armored bust of the king facing right, with “BRITAN – NIA .” on the reverse split by Britannia’s head and left arm. She is seated left on a globe, holding a sprig of olive in her right hand and a shield in her left. A stylized shield rests against the globe. After the Revolutionary War, there was a serious want for small change of the proper weight and metal. The minor penalties meted out to counterfeiters of copper coins ensured that this need would be filled in part by less than honorable means.

The other piece turned out to be an unevenly struck 1787/8 copper minted “by the authority of Connecticut,” or so the coin claimed, the first word of the abbreviated Latin

legend “AUCTORI(TATE) CONNEC(TICUTENSIS)” being clearly visible on the obverse. However, one half of the planchet on both sides was nearly blank. Fortunately, due to a sloppy alignment of the dies, the date below seated Liberty was spared the effects of the incomplete striking. In better condition, this side would read “IND ET LIB” for “Independence and Liberty.” The designs of this and other Connecticut coppers tried to resemble British halfpence to encourage wide circulation.

Unquestionably the counterfeit halfpenny of Machin’s Mills was my favorite. The question now was what variety was it? Breen’s magnum opus and the *Red Book* were unsuited for the task. Neither did early copper researcher Jon Warshawsky have the answer, but through his and Mark Switzer’s kind assistance, my attribution request was published in the Early American Coppers online newsletter. The first colonial collector I ever communicated with dropped me an e-mail on August 14, asking if I had received a satisfactory answer yet, and if not, that maybe he could help. He was Neil Rothschild, and with that effortlessness that defines certain experts, he confirmed my growing suspicions that the copper was an example of Vlack 19-87C, according to the numbering system published by Robert A. Vlack in 1974. This system was a step up from Vlack’s simpler 1964 classification. My coin was one of the most common imitation British halfpence produced by Machin’s Mills, a series sometimes called Atlee halfpence after the supposed engraver, James F. Atlee. Norman Peters in his September 1986 Numismatist article, “Machin’s Mills Halfpence: America’s Forgotten Early Coppers,” describes the bust for the obverse die (Vlack 19) as having a “round, fat face with puckered lips and almond-shaped eyes.”

It was not until this year that I fully realized the important role my Machin’s Mills copper played in the historical drama of Machin’s clandestine mint. This single coin would prod me to research the wider story of Machin’s Mills, including the life of its leading man. Most importantly, it drove me to search for clues to aid other numismatic detectives penetrate the thick mist that still hangs low over this US colonial mint.

### Soldier and Engineer

July 29, 1775:

We have three Deserters from the Regulars come into this Camp Since we Came here[,] one of whom found his own Brother here in the Camp[.] their Meeting was Very affecting[.] one hath Deserted by way of Roxbury who its [sic] thought will prove a Very Servicable [sic] Man to our Army as he is able to give a plan of all the works & fortifications [sic] in Boston and Knows all their Plans—he Says he can Direct the Army [enemy] to Storm Boston with the Loss of Very few men....

So wrote the American Colonel William T. Miller in a letter to his wife while stationed at “Camp Prospect Hill,” in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The British deserter who had come “by way of Roxbury” was Thomas Machin. Just three days earlier, this former member of Major Harry Blunt’s company of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Foot (Royal Welch Fusiliers) had snuck away in a canoe under the cover of darkness, while on sentry duty.

The namesake of Machin's Mills was a native of England, born near Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, on March 20, 1744, according to the Julian Calendar then still in use. His father was the prominent mathematician John Machin (1680–1751) who is credited with computing pi to one hundred decimal places in 1706 with what is known as Machin's Formula. Thomas developed his valuable skills in surveying and engineering while in the employ of the renowned civil engineer, James Brindley.

Nominal rolls suggest that Machin had arrived in America with the British army circa July 1773, contradicting the family tradition that he had come over in 1772 to seek out a copper mine in New Jersey for some British investors. That he decided to show where he stood with England by dumping some tea in Boston harbor is probably also a historical distortion.

What does seem clear is that Machin's skills were quickly put to work by General George Washington. In a letter dated July 21, 1776, he writes:

You are without delay to proceed for Fort Montgomery or Constitution in the High Lands on Hudsons River, and put yourself under command of Colo. George Clinton or the Commanding Officer there, - to Act as Engineer in compleating such Works as are already laid out, - and such others as you, with the advice of Colo. Clinton may think Necessary - 'Tis expected and required of You - that you pay strict and close Attention to this Business - and drive on the Works with all possible Dispatch; In case of an Attack from the Enemy, or in any Action with them you are to join and act with the Artillery on that Station, and to return to your Duty in the Regiment as soon as you can be spared from the Works

Prior attempts to secure the Highland region of New York were fraught by difficulties. A part of the unfinished "works" was an iron chain that was to be stretched across the Hudson River at Fort Montgomery to prevent British ships from sailing up the river. It broke twice shortly after Machin strung it, but thanks to his modifications, the third installation proved successful in April 1777.

Unfortunately, a three-pronged attempt by the British to gain control of the Hudson River arrived in October under the command of General Sir Henry Clinton, before the river defenses were complete. Such was the case of Machin's chevaux-de-frise (sunken log cribs with iron spikes projecting at an angle) at Pollopel's Island which was not yet effective in puncturing the bottoms of ships.

While defending Fort Montgomery, a musket ball entered through the engineer's chest. He was taken to the home of George Clinton in New Windsor where he slowly recovered. It was here that Machin became a close friend of his former military superior who had been elected the first governor of New York only a few months prior.

The British offensive succeeded in destroying several forts (including Montgomery), seizing a great quantity of supplies, and removing Machin's chain. Fortunately the British momentum did not last. In response to the defeat of General John Burgoyne at Saratoga and the hoax that persuaded General Barry St. Ledger's forces to clear out of the Mohawk Valley, Sir Henry Clinton removed his troops back to New York City.

After the British left the Highlands, Thomas set about drawing up plans for installing a second chain as early as January of the following year. This one would be placed across the river at West Point where the water was already difficult to navigate due to the narrow width and shape of the course. The chain would be forged by the Sterling Iron Works near the town of Warwick, almost 25 miles away from West Point. Each monstrous link would measure two feet in length and weigh over one hundred pounds. This was to become the famed "Great Chain," larger and superior to the Fort Montgomery chain. Researchers are still stunned at the speed in which the iron obstruction was wrought—a mere six weeks. Including swivels, clevises, and anchors, the chain would weigh a total of about 65 tons and be put in place on April 30, 1778.

As reported by Gary Trudgen in his 1986 SAR Magazine article, "Thomas Machin's Great Chain," the engineer "calculated that the chain could withstand the impact of two or three sail-ships hitting the chain at the same time." Perhaps as a testament to Machin's engineering genius, the Royal Navy never dared to test the West Point chain. Thirteen links from it, one representing each of the thirteen original states, were preserved and eventually arranged into a monument at Trophy Point at West Point where they can still be seen today, coated occasionally with shiny black enamel.

Before the war had ended, Machin married Susan Van Nostrant in August 1782. The following March, Machin was made a Captain by Governor Clinton, a title he would be popularly known by.

In a letter written to James Spilman by Eric Newman on October 17, 1983, the latter numismatist recounted some of the research he had gathered on Machin's Mills over the course of many years. "The Machin's Mills site," Newman wrote, "was owned by Thomas Beatty until Jan. 5, 1779 when it was conveyed to Munson Ward. It was bought by George Clinton on Mar. 20, 1782. Sold by Clinton to Daniel Byrns and Hugh Walsh on October 29, 1793. Machin never owned anything there but used the Clinton land. This is in the Ulster County records, I believe, as this area is now Orange County."

By late May of 1783, Thomas and his wife were living on the property Clinton had graciously allowed them to use on the eastern side of Great Pond, now known as Orange Lake. Machin dubbed the area New Grange, a name that persisted for many years. It was here that the famous saw and grist mill was raised in 1784. Machin dug a new lake outlet to power it, in an area where it often flooded, and connected it to Chambers Creek, known today as Quassaic Creek, which lay a little north of the canal. One of the results was a triangular island created by the two watercourses. The mill is believed to have stood at the point where they joined, about 700 feet from the lake.

### **From Miller to Minter**

Thomas Machin did not stay a miller for long, not when he saw brighter opportunities for making a living. Not all was well at the close of the Revolutionary War. In fact, the economic situation was comparable to the Great Depression. As discussed earlier, one of the many problems was a severe lack of small change, exasperated by widespread counterfeiting. The states eventually responded by producing their own copper coins: New Jersey, Connecticut, and Massachusetts among them. Each contracted private coiners to carry out the work. The potentially lucrative nature of this trade motivated several people to offer their services to the state of New York. One of them was Thomas Machin. Connected to his petition (or soon to be) were five other residents

of New York: David Brooks, James Grier, Samuel Atlee, James F. Atlee, and James Giles (pronounced Jiles). Several of the men had probably first met Machin during their service in the Revolutionary War. James Atlee is believed to have been an experienced die sinker and engraver who, prior to teaming up with Machin, had possibly been employed by the Rahway Mint in New Jersey. He also apparently made a living counterfeiting British halfpence. Until recently, researchers weren't certain what relation, if any, the two Atlees were to each other, but now it has been shown that Samuel was the father of James.

Machin's coinage proposal was read by the New York State Legislature on March 3, 1787. Twelve days later a three-man committee was established to investigate the possibility of minting copper coins in the state and to regulate the value of the coins already in circulation. One of the members was David Brooks, who would be a future partner in Machin's coining firm. Another was John Lansing. He had close connections with Machin's friend George Clinton who in turn was a proponent for strong state autonomy. One of the pattern copper coins James Atlee engraved to convince the committee featured the bust of the governor on the obverse and the state seal on the back.

Unfortunately, by early April, New York abandoned the idea of home-struck coins. Gary Trudgen strongly suspects in his 1987 Rare Coin Review article, "Machin's Mills Bicentennial," that the reason may have lain with the third member of the committee, Alexander Hamilton. This future secretary of the US treasury was a staunch Federalist. "Somehow," Trudgen writes, "Hamilton's views won out."

Whether aware of the State's decision or not, the wannabe minters formed a copartnership on April 18. Amazingly, the indenture, with its lengthy terms, is preserved in the ANS Library. As specified in the document, both Thomas Machin and James Attlee were to equally oversee the minting of coins (the manufactory of "hardware"), James Giles was to be the cashier and bookkeeper, and the other three were to take on all the other responsibilities of the business. Clearly it was not easy to deter these men.

### Minting Mischief

In his monumental work, *The Early Coins of America and the Laws Governing Their Issue* (1875), Sylvester S. Crosby recorded a Vermont copper with an obverse reading "AUCTORI VERMON" combined with a counterfeit 1787 British halfpenny reverse! This coin is commonly known as the Vermont "BRITANNIA" copper, cataloged by Vlack as VT-87C, and by Hillyer Ryder as Ryder 13 in his 1919 *American Journal of Numismatics* paper, "The Colonial Coins of Vermont." Crosby was aware that Machin's Mills had produced unauthorized copies of British halfpence from information supplied by the early numismatic detective Charles Bushnell (1821–1880). Interestingly, Bushnell's report was a condensed and modified version of the account given by Machin's son, Thomas N. Machin (1785–1875). Crosby published Bushnell's report verbatim on page 191 of his work as follows:

The Mint House at Newburgh, Ulster County, N.Y., was situated on the east side of Machin's Lake or Pond, about one eighth of a mile distant from the pond. The building was erected in 1784, by Thomas Machin, and was still standing in 1792, at which time the rollers, press and cutting machine were taken out. The coins were struck by means of a large bar

loaded at each end with a 500 pound ball, with ropes attached. Two men were required on each side, making four in all, to strike the pieces, besides a man to set the planchets. The metal of which the coins were struck, was composed of old brass cannon and mortars, the zinc from the copper being extracted by smelting in a furnace. About sixty of the coins were struck a minute. The sloop "Newburgh," (Capt. Isaac Belknap,) carried for a number of years the coining press, as part ballast. The coins were made by James F. Atlee. Many of them bore the obverse "GEORGIUS III." and rev. "INDE ET LIB." Others bore the figure of a plough on one side. The mint ceased operations in the year 1791.

In Machin Jr.'s account, he adds that "Atlee, the engraver, wore a horrid mask, and frightened some boys who came to fish so that they never ventured near the mill again." Other workers are said to have also worn masks, "to create a terror in the neighborhood." Because the blanks were often left revolving in a cylinder at night filled with sand, saw-dust, and water to make them smooth, "the coiners circulated the story that the devil came by at night to work for them." Michael Hodder speculates in his article "Halloween at Machin's Mills," published in the October 1990 issue of the *Colonial Newsletter*, "that the masks referred to worn by Atlee and others may simply have been facial protection from the high heat and sparks of the hearths." He believes their novelty alone may have been enough to scare away children. But this does not fully address Machin Jr.'s description of Atlee's mask as "horrid" or the mint workers' attempts at storytelling to keep people away. Most likely, the masks served a dual purpose.

Crosby saw in the Vermont "BRITANNIA" copper and similar Vermont hybrids an uncanny link between Reuben Harmon's mint in Rupert, Vermont, and the New York mint. This suspicion stemmed in part from another indenture which, like the one cited earlier, the great researcher transcribed verbatim in his work. It was signed on June 7, 1787, by both the New York and Vermont minters. This document is also preserved in the ANS Library, bound together with the first.

The new agreement outlined the terms by which Machin's Mills merged with Harmon's coining facility, illustrating for us the determination of the New Yorkers to find work for their unfinished mint. The Vermont coiners had produced coppers under contract for the independent republic for almost two years. They had recently secured an eight year extension to their coinage grant, beginning July 1, the same date that Machin's mill was to be fully transformed into a functioning mint. Although each partner of the new group was to share one-tenth in the profits and losses of both operations, the team from New York were to contribute two different sums, totaling 600 pounds, for the privilege of teaming up with Harmon and his people.

It would take many years before numismatists would satisfactorily unravel the story behind the Vermont "BRITANNIA" copper. Much insight was provided in Wyllis Betts's address before the American Numismatic and Archaeological Society in April 1886, titled "Counterfeit Half Pence Current in the American Colonies, and Their Issue from the Mints of Connecticut and Vermont." He showed how the counterfeit British halfpenny variety that Vlack would picture and number many years later in his photographic plates as Vlack 19-87C, shared the same reverse die with Vlack VT-87C.

He attributed it to “the well-known mint of Atlee and Mackin.” The stronger reverse details of the former coin, relative to the very weak features that characterized the reverse of the Vermont issue, particularly in the word “BRITANNIA,” led him to believe the cause was die wear. Some later researchers, however, drummed up the idea that the minters had purposely obscured the reverse inscription so as to make it more acceptable for use on a Vermont coin issue. It was Gary Trudgen who finally put the matter to rest. In his seminal study in the August 2007 issue of the *Colonial Newsletter*, “The Illogical and Curious Vermont ‘Britannia’ Copper,” he followed the life of Vlack 87C through its pairings with six different obverse dies, one that was paired twice at two different times! From Vlack 20-87C, to its final marriage to the Vermont obverse, it was abundantly clear why poor Britannia looked so “worn out” on the last coin in the chain.

Around the same time that the Vermont “BRITANNIA” copper was first discussed, numismatists were occupied with another perplexing matter. Many contended that the profile on the Vermont bust copper issues was of George III with a seated Britannia on the reverse, even though the inscriptions on both sides were distinctly Vermont. Edmund F. Slafter, author of *The Vermont Coinage* (1870) was very critical of these “fancies so utterly baseless and idle.” The truth probably would have shocked him when it was finally revealed by Eric P. Newman in the next century. His findings were published in the 1958 *Centennial Publication of The American Numismatic Society* and were centered around a coin from the controversial “Stepney Hoard.” This stash of approximately 209 colonial era coppers, which has been claimed by some to be someone’s coin collection masquerading as a hoard, was supposedly found buried in an iron kettle inside a barn in Fairfield County, Connecticut, in 1950. The intriguing coin discussed by Newman was a 1776 imitation British halfpenny, later cataloged by Vlack as 9-76B. Not only was it struck with the same portrait punch used on several of the Vermont bust issues, but also the same Britannia punch showing the stripes of the British Union in the shield! In addition, three of the date numerals were found to be identical to the date on a 1786 Connecticut copper issue, known to specialists of the series as Miller 1-A, according to Henry Clay Miller’s groundbreaking ANS reference, *The State Coinage of Connecticut* (1919).

From studying Vlack VT-87C, previous researchers helped establish that some sort of connection existed between Machin’s Mills and the Rupert mint. Now, with the discovery of the first Vlack 9-76B and observations, Newman was able to finally reveal some of the gritty details. He concluded in his ANS Centennial paper that “the Vermont coiners needed James F. Atlee’s diemaking services, his punches and tools so desperately that they were willing both to give up 60% of the profits from their franchise and to decorate Vermont coins with the king and the symbol of the country against which they had fought to obtain their freedom.”

While the engraving of Vermont dies undoubtedly kept James Atlee busy, the rest of the mint staff needed something to actually coin. Their answer was to resume Atlee’s practice of counterfeiting British halfpence of George III. Genuine coins and British imitations constituted an important part of early American circulation.

By the late 1780s, the state mints were faltering. In a complete reversal of what the state governments had sought to remedy, circulation became a foul smelling pool of inferior lightweight coppers, flooded by both legally and illegally minted state coppers. They contributed to the Copper Panic of 1789 when the price of copper metal and public

confidence in copper currency plummeted. With the notable exception of New Jersey coppers, most were severely devalued.

As the state mints began closing their doors, the Machin Mills group began buying up their minting equipment. At some point they began minting Vermont coppers themselves and expanded their operations to include illicit issues of Connecticut coppers. As shown by Newman, one of those issues was likely Miller 1-A. Connecticut coppers were struck from 1785 to at least 1788, and consist of over one hundred distinct types. Pieces dated 1788 are usually underweight, crudely executed, and were minted long after the Company for Coining Coppers handed the reigns to the corrupt Jarvis and Company. As such, the 1788 issues are generally considered to have been unlawfully produced. According to ongoing research by Dr. Philip Mossman, he believes more than one illegal operation was involved in minting these last issues. Quite to my surprise, he has firmly attributed my Connecticut copper, a Miller 9-R, to Machin's Mills!

Even though Machin's mint managed to outlive the state mints, its days were numbered. What little profit they may have made before 1789 was probably now but a trace if anything. "The figure of a plough" on some Machin's Mills coins has generated speculation that the minters had turned their attention to copying the reliable coppers of New Jersey as a last ditch effort to stay in business, at least temporarily. Their obverses featured a horse's head with a plow beneath and a shield on the reverses. They were granted legal tender status within their home state.

The US Constitution, which strictly forbids states from minting their own money, went into effect on March 4, 1789. Machin's Mills would close soon after. From a letter dated October 14, 1790, we are told that James F. Atlee wrote to Thomas Machin requesting that the partners dissolve the enterprise on suitable terms so as to avoid a tedious and expensive lawsuit. Clearly not everyone was happy.

In January 1791, Machin would move from New Grange to the area of modern-day Charleston, New York. The mint was reconverted into a grist mill and finally abandoned in 1817, about a year after Thomas Machin passed away on April 3, 1816.

### The Search Begins

Around the time when certain counterfeit British halfpence were finally being recognized as products of Machin's Mills, some of our hobby's leading numismatic minds were already conducting investigations of the mint site. One early visit was undertaken by Eric P. Newman, his wife, and Wayte Raymond in 1955. Newman related to this writer that he was driven there in "Wayte Raymond's big Cadillac from New York City to Newburg where," he reports, "I saw portions of the chain and log Hudson River blockade erected to prevent British ships from going upriver by the Americans getting an opportunity to fire at a stationary vessel with cannon balls from the shore. We then went up to Orange Lake to see its several outlets and their adjustable board dams and think we located the site of the mill on a confined rivulet which powered the machinery."

Tantalizing details of his visit are also to be found in the letter Newman wrote to Spilman:

I visited the Machin's site in 1955 (June) with my wife and Wayte Raymond. I went into Thomas Machin's home on Orange Lake where Mrs. C. W. Butt was then living and she showed me the old beams, the

fireplace[,] the [D]utch oven, and the cellar entrance. I think she gave me the photograph enclosed. She introduced me to Grace Nichols (born 1882) who lived in the house as a child and who found copper coins around the creek when she was a girl. Her father was chief of police of Newburgh, his name [was] James Henry Sarvis.

Records indicate that Sarvis was police chief from 1887–1895 and born on May 4, 1840. His family moved to Newburgh from a farm in Fostertown, New Jersey, when he was three years old.

Gary Trudgen himself would carefully analyze the mint site during the 1980s. One time he searched with a local metal detectorist. Although “nothing of significance” was unearthed, the results of Trudgen’s investigations during this decade were nevertheless valuable. He was able to relocate the probable remains of the mint site which merely consisted of a portion of the foundation walls. It was located about 400 feet from Orange Lake at the end of Machin’s hand-dug canal, indicating that the lake has been continually expanding, but not to the point yet of submerging the site as has been rumored by some! Trudgen also found the site of the Machins’ home which by this time was sadly comparable to the remains of the mill.

Based on the physical remains and the description handed down by Machin’s son, a conceptual drawing of how the mill probably looked was created on Trudgen’s behalf by a local artist. As the drawing shows, Trudgen was able to determine that the building was built lengthwise across the canal and operated by a paddle water wheel directly beneath.

With permission of the then land owner, Gary Trudgen and Oliver Shipp, a historian of Newburgh, proposed a historical marker to be erected near Machin’s Mills. In this they were successful and it was dedicated on September 22, 1984. According to a contemporary newspaper account, “the cast iron marker was funded by the Newburgh Coin Club through Gary Ferguson, Trudgen and county government through its Heritage Commission.” The sign reads: “THOMAS MACHIN’S MINT / AN EARLY AMERICAN MINT WAS LOCATED NEAR HERE, RUN BY WATERCOURSE FROM LAKE. BUILT 1787, SEVERAL TYPES OF COINS WERE MINTED.”

A slightly later mint site survey was a field walking expedition on February 26, 1989, conducted by the editors William Anton and Bruce Kesse of *The Forgotten Coins of the North American Colonies: A Modern Survey of Early English and Irish Counterfeit Coppers Circulating in the Americas* (1992). An account of their adventure is published in this title. Much stone rubble was discovered at the site and wood debris but, as Anton and Kesse write, “All that remains today of the mill’s foundation is one fieldstone wall approximately fifteen feet in width [*sic*] and five feet in height.” Opposite this wall, north of a ninety degree turn in the canal towards Quassaic Creek to the west, was stone rubble on the south bank which the authors interpreted as the remnants of another wall, the distance between representing the width of the building or about fifteen feet. They note that this is in contradiction to the measurements given by Machin’s son (30 x 40 feet), but a study of their site sketch indicates that Trudgen interpreted the remains a bit differently. One notable artifact found during the Anton and Kesse survey was a wooden paddle from the mill’s water wheel.

### Radford Curdy

What were likely the most important investigations of Thomas Machin's mint to date were not known until very recently. They would possibly have been completely forgotten were it not for a few diligent collectors that attended the Absolute Auctions & Reality Inc. sale held on January 13, 2007. Connecticut copper researcher Robert Martin was one of those in attendance. He didn't learn until roughly 48 hours in advance that the sale would contain colonial artifacts, including coins, unearthed throughout New England by the late Radford Curdy (1935–2002).

Curdy was the historian of Dutchess County in New York during the early 1980s and an amateur archaeologist. He belonged to several local historical societies, particularly the Fishkill Historical Society which he was president of for a time. A diehard collector of small means, every spare penny was put towards enhancing his varied collections, which included everything from books and historical ephemera to colonial antiques. His love of local history found strong expression in writing. An online biography provided by Absolute Auctions & Realty claims his first work was "The Flow of Destiny," published in 1959 for the 350th Hudson-Champlain Celebration and written under his ancestral name, "de Corday." His refusal to divulge where he lived to prevent thieves from stealing his priceless relics of the Revolutionary War forced him to resign as county historian in 1981. Wherever he did live was apparently inadequate for the number of items in his collections. Parts of it were said to have been housed in public storage facilities and even at friends' houses.

Two of the lots Martin examined before the start of the Curdy estate sale stopped him cold. Each contained relics Curdy personally recovered from Machin's Mills. Lot 1075 contained a 1787 Connecticut copper that was an early die stage of the famous horned bust variety (Miller 4-L), struck before the characteristic die break had occurred. On the envelope, Curdy provided the following enigmatic report: "found in burnt ash in smeltery area, Machin Mills, April, 1965." Lot 1099 consisted of twelve copper fragments and two counterfeit Mexican 2 reales.

Martin won the Connecticut copper for a probable paltry \$23. If Curdy's interpretation of the find spot is correct, then this would have been the first piece of evidence to indicate that copper smelting was done on site and not elsewhere. Martin raised several tantalizing questions about the coin in the 2007 proceedings of *Roger Siboni's Beach Coin Symposium*. "Since it was found," Martin writes, "in burnt ash in the smelter area, was it intended to be melted into planchet stock and re-coined or was it to be used as a host planchet, like many of the issues produced at Machin's Mills, or was it accidentally dropped by a mint worker or visitor?"

While Martin was the only bidder for the Connecticut copper, he was less successful in obtaining the group lot. An online bidder bagged it despite Martin's bold efforts. Some time later the winner was revealed to be John Kraljevich, an experienced and well-respected dealer in early Americana.

Through the kind assistance of Kraljevich, he mailed most of the find material to this writer to photograph and study. Upon examination, the story of Curdy's excavations at Machin's Mills instantly became more complex. He not only visited the site in 1965, but also in 1966, 1975 and 1980, according to the dates on the envelopes. One of the irregular pieces of copper metal, fairly flat on one side, was described as a "partially rolled coin blank" found in "the rolling mill area." It was recovered in the spring of 1980

with a metal detector. Most likely this detector was Radford Curdy's White's Coinmaster 5000/D. Another piece of copper, much smaller and pellet-shaped, was referred to as a "copper dripping - sprew" from the "smeltery-hearth area" where Martin's Connecticut copper was found.

One of the most spectacular finds in the group was a nearly complete planchet intended for a halfpenny-sized coin. It exhibits two small, bite-like clips directly opposite each other. They were likely created when two blanks were cut out of the copper sheet a little too close. It was recovered in 1975 and, like several of the other finds, was found on the "south side of [the] site." This agrees with Gary Trudgen's belief that the mill was opened from that side. Many tiny pieces of copper scrap were probably swept out the door from time to time.

A simple X-ray fluorescent analysis (XRF), conducted specially for this article by John Lorenzo, shows that the clipped planchet contains approximately 96.9% copper, 0.77% lead, 0.13% silver, 0.13% iron, 0.97% bismuth, 0.01% antimony, 0.97% arsenic, and traces of other metals. The results are very similar to the composition of my Vlack 19-87C and Connecticut copper, which were also tested. All the other copper fragments were shown to be likewise similar, except for one small piece described as a "sheet copper fragment." It contained no detectable lead or bismuth, indicating a possibly recent date of manufacture.

As for the two Mexican two reales, one was a lead cast found in Poughkeepsie and so not sent with the rest of the find material. The other, a very worn piece struck in copper (~99.3%) and dated 1776, was engraved with a Mexico mintmark and an assayer used only at Potosí. Because of its association with the copper fragments, Robert Martin believed it was a Machin's Mills find. At least six examples of this type, including the Curdy find, are known. An American origin was tentatively suggested in the auction descriptions for the two pieces sold by Stack's in July 2007 and December 2009. Although the envelope for the Curdy specimen is currently misplaced, the Stack's cataloger claims the coin was found in New Windsor, "just downriver from Machin's Mills," and so not at the actual mint site.

Unbeknownst to Martin, the 2007 Curdy estate sale was not the first. The bulk of Curdy's collections had been sold off by the same auction firm in 2005. Near the end of researching this article, it was learned that lot 682 of the May 14 session contained another large group of Machin's Mills artifacts, including what looks like a hefty block of copper. Unlike similar lots from this sale, it sold for a healthy \$275 plus a \$55 buyer's premium to "njcoppers." As of this writing, the identity of the winning bidder remains unknown.

Surely it is a tragedy to colonial numismatics to have missed the opportunity to know Radford Curdy better before his unexpected death, but not all may be lost. Curdy left behind two unfinished historical books and private journals detailing his archeological digs. It is possible that somewhere in these papers he may have discussed his findings at Machin's Mills. In support of this are catalog numbers Curdy wrote on the backs of several of the find envelopes. Could they be referring to additional information logged elsewhere?

**Digging Deeper...**

It was humid and hot on the morning of August 4, 2012, when two intrepid explorers set off through the tangle of growth that has come to define much of the Machin family's former estate. One was the current owner of the property who had acquired it in September 2000. "One of the reasons I bought some of the land in that area," he explained, "was to hopefully one day identify the actual site and preserve it for its historical importance." The other adventurer was Julia Purdy, a colonial coin collector and experienced metal detectorist. Both she and the owner were very receptive to my idea of conducting a new survey of Machin's Mills to shed more light on its hazy past.

Gary Trudgen remarked after examining the many photos Purdy would take during the roughly three hour exploration that he was "pleased to see that little has changed since I explored the sites several years ago." These included the Machin homestead, Machin's hand-dug canal, and the mint site. The bit of existing wall standing on the peninsular created by Machin's canal and Quassaic Creek was accidentally dismissed by Purdy as a pile of rocks and so was not investigated up close. Also, the banks of the canal were surprisingly steep. Accordingly, her efforts at metal detecting were mainly concentrated around the stone foundations of the Machins' home. She graciously loaned an extra detector to the owner so he could join in the hunt for colonial relics. He nicknamed her "Farm Girl" because she continued the hunt undaunted after becoming covered in "sticky green seed pods" when she was excitedly photographing the ruins.

Although nothing much of historical interest was uncovered during this latest survey, the property owner did find a Taurus astrology token that may date to the 1950s. It was discovered behind the homestead where litter from local campsites has been building up for years in addition to much older, early to mid 20th century rubbish, making metal detecting there very tricky. Perhaps the most interesting find was a button-like object with a lavender or pink glass center, found about 100 feet away from the home site by a stone wall. Its identity and age are still uncertain. One possibility put forward is that it could be the end of a curtain rod.

For Purdy and this writer, the most promising find was an old shotgun shell found on one of the banks of the canal. The fact that it wasn't dug up before suggests that the many metal detectorists who doubtlessly scoured the area in years past had left some ground unsearched. It is with this and the other encouraging evidence presented here that more surveys of Machin's Mills will be hopefully conducted in the near future. Should they turn up a major discovery, a follow-up article will be considered here in the hope of attracting possible archaeological interest to the site as a better means to unraveling the past of one of the most mysterious minting operations in American colonial times.